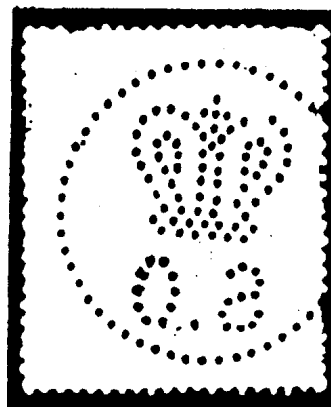


THE ENIGMA OF THE STATIONERY OFFICE PERFIN DIES SOLVED

by Betty Lucas

The U.K. Official Department which has used perfins for the longest period is His (Her) Majesty's Stationery Office for such perfins are known from 1880 up until a few years ago. There was only one break of 20 years at the beginning of this Century. There have been four, or possibly five, distinct dies, though the origin of one of them has always been a mystery. This was what is known as the "provisional" die. During research for our forthcoming book on G.B. official Perfins, which is due to be published later this year, my co-author and I were lucky enough to come across some fresh information which solves the enigma.

The first die used by the Stationery Office was a large crown over the initials S.O., inside a circle, which was uniform with a series of similar dies used by Government Departments at that time to cancel fiscal stamps. These particular stamps were perfinned after affixing to documents for security reasons and were also cancelled with an obliterator which was in the form of an eight-pointed star, usually struck in black. This perforator was used from about 1880 and was not originally

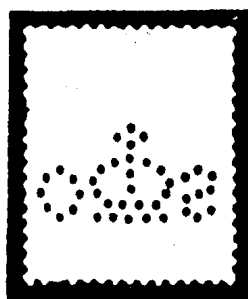


intended for use on stamps going through the post. However, from 1886 fiscal and postage stamps were interchangeable and some may be found postally used, though the fact that they were usually perfined after affixing to a document would seem to discount this. The first perforation continued in use for about twenty years when it was officially withdrawn. It would appear there was an official change of heart for in 1922 a new perfin was introduced for use on postage stamps. This was a neat design incorporating the initials S.O. on either side of a crown. This is the well known die 1. The earliest recorded use to my knowledge is 20th December, 1922. It is a common perfin found on many later issues of George V, Edward VIII and early issues of George VI stamps. In 1949 its use was discontinued following a complaint by the Post Office that it contravened their regulations as it included a design and was not made up solely by the use of initials. The circumstances surrounding this complaint were reported in this Bulletin by John Nelson (SEPS Bulletin 5 & 6/75). A "legal" replacement die was introduced in 1949. This consisted of the letters H.M. over S.O. What has puzzled collectors is that two types are known, Die 2a and Die 2b. The latter die is fairly common on stamps right up to current issues, but the former, the "provisional", is very rare and is only known on dated examples in early 1948. It was first identified by one of our members, Mary Thornton, who reported it in this Bulletin. Only a few examples are known to exist and it was always considered to be a provisional die.

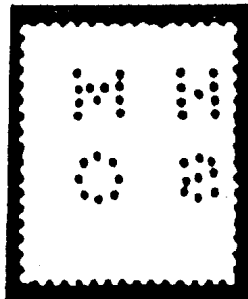
Following contact with H.M. Stationery Office early this year, I learnt that an old perforating machine, formerly used by the Stationery Office, was in a store in London. It bore a metal plate identifying it as a Sloper Machine No. 68939. Slopers records show that this machine was originally manufactured by Hurlin and that it was overhauled and modified in late 1949 by Slopers when a new perforating head, containing 12 dies, was supplied. Stamps perforated in early 1949 show the original Hurlin perfin design (Die 2a) whilst those perforated later in 1949, and from that date, show the new Sloper Die 2b. This is the reason so few examples of Die 2a exist.

A few weeks ago, knowing of our interest in the machine the Stationery Office contacted ray co-author as the Sloper machine was being sold for scrap. We are now the proud possessors of the Sloper Machine 68939 (see elsewhere in this Bulletin). Had it not been for our current research, the mystery might never have been solved.

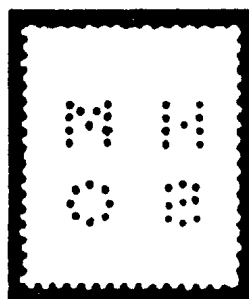
That is not the end of the story. One mystery still remains, that of Die 3, which is shown, but not identified, in the McKee & Tomkins catalogue (No. H.S. 20.2). If any member has information on this die, possibly with an example, whether it is identified or not, could they please let me know?



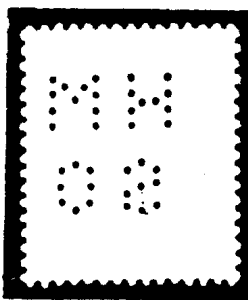
I



IIa



IIb



III?